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30 November 2004

RUS43105.E

Russia: The situation of internally displaced persons from Chechnya (January 2003 - November 2004)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Statistics

While the exact number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Russian Federation is unknown, a report prepared in February 2004 by the representative of the secretary-general on internally displaced persons (IDPs) of the United Nations (UN), Francis M. Deng, indicated that as at "14 January 2004, a total of 66,792 IDPs from Chechnya were registered for assistance in Ingushetia [with] the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)" (UN 24 Feb. 2004, 8-9). Further, an estimated 8,000 Chechen IDPs were residing in the Republic of Dagestan, 40,000 were residing in other parts of the country, and there were approximately 140,000 Chechen IDPs within Chechnya (ibid., 9).

The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) indicated that in total there were over 368,000 IDPs in Russia at the end of 2003 (2004). This total

... included about 194,000 [IDPs] in Chechnya, 67,000 in neighboring Ingushetia from the current Russian-Chechen conflict, 8,000 in neighboring Dagestan, an estimated 40,000 elsewhere in the northern Caucasus region and Moscow, some 48,000 persons displaced during the previous (1994-96) war in Chechnya (mostly ethnic Russians, who were registered as forced migrants), and more than 11,000 forced migrants in Ingushetia who were displaced in 1992 during the conflict over the disputed Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia (2004).

According to the report by Francis M. Deng, post-1995, most of the displacement in Russia has been caused by the conflict in Chechnya, meaning the majority of those displaced are Chechens (24 Feb. 2004, 8).

The Security Situation in Chechnya

According to the USCR, "[w]idespread human rights violations continued amid sporadic clashes between the rebel forces and the Russian military and police" (2004). In September 2003, Human Rights Watch (HRW) described Chechnya as "an active conflict zone, with both sides responsible for serious human rights and humanitarian law violations" (22 Sept. 2003, 8).

During a presentation on the Russian Federation, including Chechnya, at the Ninth European Country of Origin Information Seminar held in Dublin, Ireland, on 26 May 2004, a researcher of HRW indicated that the security situation in Chechnya is not stable and that innocent civilians are routinely killed. There are also, on average, two disappearances daily, and this number reflects only cases that HRW has been able to document (HRW 26 May 2004). In the past, the HRW researcher indicated, if an individual was "picked up" by the Russian forces in Chechnya, they were likely to return within 24 to 48 hours (ibid.). Now there is "no certainty that the person will return" (ibid.). The researcher added that those who are responsible for the killings and disappearances are not punished because there exists an "absolute sense of impunity [and] no accountability" (HRW 26 May 2004; see also HRW 20 May 2004).

Corroborating information was reported by Amnesty International (AI) in its June 2004 report on the situation in Chechnya:

...there seems to be no end in sight either to the conflict itself or to the accompanying human rights abuses. ... These include extrajudicial killings, "disappearances" and torture, including rape, and ill-treatment ... Such violations and abuses, many of which constitute war crimes, are overwhelmingly committed with impunity [by Russian and Chechen security forces], as very few perpetrators are ever identified and brought to justice (23 June 2004).

That Russian and/or Chechen security forces commit human rights abuses that go uninvestigated and/or unpunished was also reported by HRW in January 2004, which added that Russian forces also "loot[ed] homes [and] physically abuse[d] villagers," and by Amnesty International in 2003, which added that although Russian forces and pro-Moscow Chechen police had reduced the number of *zachistki* (large military raids), they had begun targeted night-time operations against houses and persons, which were "routinely accompanied by serious human rights violations, and Chechens-particularly males-continued to be killed or 'disappeared' in large numbers" (1 Oct. 2003, 57; see also AI 1 Oct. 2003, 58).

IDPs in Ingushetia

IDPs in Ingushetia live in tent camps, ad hoc settlements or private homes of local citizens (AI 1 Oct. 2003, 57; UN 24 Feb. 2004, 11). As at 25 September 2003, more than 11,000 Chechen IDPs were housed in five tent camps in Ingushetia: Bella (PRIMA 25 Sept. 2003), Alina (AI 5 Dec. 2003), Bart, Satista and Sputnik (UNHCR 5 Mar. 2004). By June 2004, all five camps had been closed by the government (ibid. 16 July 2004; ibid. 4 June 2004). When camp Bart was closed on 1 March 2004, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) reported that "[a]lternative shelter was offered in temporary settlements in Ingushetia for those not ... willing to return to Chechnya" (5 Mar. 2004). As at March 2004, there were more than 200 temporary settlements in Ingushetia (UNHCR 5 Mar. 2004).

However, several reports indicated that the camp closures were accompanied by coercion, and "intimidation and harassment" of IDPs to return to Chechnya (AI 5 Dec. 2003; see also PRIMA 25 Sept. 2003; UNHCR 16 July 2004). In the camps and temporary settlements, tactics such as cutting off gas, electricity and water for varying periods of time (PRIMA 25 Sept. 2003; UNHCR 24 Feb. 2004; see also HRW Jan. 2004) and threats of violence and arrests were

used to coerce IDPs to return to Chechnya (HRW Jan. 2004). In September 2003, HRW reported that a tactic to force Chechen IDPs to return to Chechnya that was used by federal and local migration authorities before the camps were closed was to remove the names of Chechen IDPs from camp registration lists, thereby evicting them from government-funded housing and causing them to return to Chechnya for financial reasons (HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 5).

That the authorities employed various tactics to pressure Chechen IDPs to return to Chechnya was also reported by HRW in 2003 (22 Sept. 2003, 2, 5, 23) and 2004 (HRW 20 May 2004), by the USCR in 2004, and by Amnesty International in 2003 (1 Oct. 2003, 57) and 2004 (AI 23 June 2004).

The Chechen administration, however, denied that Chechen IDPs were being forced to return to Chechnya from Ingushetia and stated that those who wanted to remain in Ingushetia were permitted to do so "but not in tent camps. [The government indicated that it would] provide them with better living conditions" (Interfax 15 Aug. 2003).

Amnesty International reported in June 2004 that although Ingushetia was once known as a safe place for Chechen IDPs, "[h]uman rights abuses which previously occurred almost exclusively in Chechnya [were] increasingly spreading ... to neighbouring Ingushetia" (23 June 2004; see also HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 2, 9). According to HRW, as at July 2004, "Russian forces regularly conducted military operations [in Ingushetia], targeting both Chechen internally displaced persons [and] the local Ingush population" (Jan. 2004; see also AI 1 Oct. 2003, 57; *ibid.* 23 June 2004). The operations, which according to HRW have also been carried out by Chechen rebels, included "arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment and looting" (AI 1 Oct. 2003, 57; HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 2). The perpetrators of these abuses "enjoy complete impunity ... [as] no investigations have been launched ... and the victims are actively discouraged from pursuing their cases with the authorities" (HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 20). Chechen IDPs believe that the increased violence in Ingushetia is another tactic employed by Russian authorities to force them back to Chechnya (HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 2).

Government Incentives to Return to Chechnya

Despite the security situation in Chechnya, in September 2003, the government declared that it would provide compensation (approximately US\$10,000) to Chechen IDPs whose homes and property had been destroyed through the conflicts (HRW 22 Sept. 2003, 5; UN 24 Feb. 2004, 15-16). Chechen IDPs were also promised "a cash grant of 1,000 roubles [CDN\$42 (Bank of Canada 29 Nov. 2004)] per person, a 12-month food ration, and the provision of rooms in temporary accommodation centres or arrangements for private accommodation" (UNHCR 4 June 2004). However, to benefit from this initiative, Chechen IDPs would have to return to Chechnya (UN 24 Feb. 2004, 16). During interviews with the representative of the secretary-general on internally displaced persons (IDPs), Francis M. Deng, Chechen IDPs who returned to Grozny indicated that they did not receive compensation or adequate humanitarian assistance, although the physical conditions of temporary accommodation centres "appeared generally satisfactory" (UN 24 Feb. 2004, 15).

The representative stated that the government should offer compensation to non-returning Chechen IDPs, which the government agreed to do once the drafting of the appropriate legislation was completed (*ibid.*, 16). In February

2004, the government announced that of 24,900 applications filed for compensation, and 9,600 positive decisions were rendered of which over 1,700 IDPs had received compensation (ibid.). According to a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the compensation initiative is "more or less implemented," but the initiative is to conclude in 2004 (26 May 2004).

Chechen IDPs Elsewhere in the Russian Federation

Internal displacement in the Russian Federation is regulated by the Law on Forced Migrants of 1993 (UN 24 Feb. 2004, 9). Article 1 defines a forced migrant as

"a citizen of the Russian Federation who was forced or has intention to leave the place of his/her permanent residence on the territory of another State or on the territory of the Russian Federation due to violence committed against him/her or members of his/her family or persecution or due to a real danger of being subjected to persecution for reasons of race, nationality, religion, language, or membership of a certain social group or political opinion following hostile campaigns with regard to individual persons or groups of persons, mass public disturbances and other circumstances significantly infringing on human rights... A person without Russian Federation citizenship can also be recognized as a forced migrant if he/she left the place of his/her permanent residence on the territory of the Russian Federation due to circumstances stipulated in part 1 of this article".

"A citizen of the former USSR who lived on the territory of a republic that was a part of the USSR who arrived in the Russian Federation due to circumstances stipulated in the first part of this article and who acquired the citizenship of the Russian Federation while on the territory of the Russian Federation can also be recognized as a forced migrant" (ibid., 9-10).

Gaining forced migrant status is necessary to acquire things such as special allowances, housing assistance, job placement and loans (ibid.). According to a UNHCR representative at the seminar in Dublin, Ireland, migrant status has in the past generally been granted to non-Chechens (26 May 2004; see also UN 24 Feb. 2004, 10).

To enjoy their rights, Chechens are required to register their place of residence (UNHCR 26 May 2004). Most Chechens living outside Chechnya have not registered their residence, but this was not problematic until the conflict that continues in 2004, since which time there have been "instances of harassment of persons" who were not registered (ibid.). Cities that have large numbers of migrants "have made it difficult for citizens to register residence in those cities" (ibid.). Citizens can be fined for "illegal residence" (ibid.). According to the UNHCR representative, the problem is that "Chechens cannot legalize their residence status outside of Chechnya" (ibid.)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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